

SURVIVING TRADITIONAL ART OF MELANESIA

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Dedicated to Joseph deNeeve

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I. THE SEARCH FOR TRADITIONAL ART

The newly-independent nations of Melanesia (Papua New Guinea, the Solomons Republic, and Vanuatu are considered for this study) are currently struggling to become participants in the international world markets while contending with typical problems of developing countries: overpopulation, unemployment, and urban drift. Many of the indigenous inhabitants, however, continue to live by long-established economical, social, and ceremonial institutions. Obviously, most--if not all--of these traditional institutions are in a state of flux, due in large part to contact with external influences: Westernized belief systems, money markets, and a spawning desire for material possessions. Already a major test of these traditional systems has commenced: the induced acculturation may permanently draw away younger people from their cultural heritages.

This has not developed equally over all of Melanesia. In fact, some regions--due to factors such as competition and relative isolation from urban centers--retain some elements of their traditional societies. The objective of this research is to identify cultures which give at least an impression that they still possess one means (i.e., their visual arts) of expressing their cultural individuality, and to penetrate further with evidence to either support or refute this impression. The five art-producing traditions to be analyzed are the Iatmul of Papua New Guinea's middle Sepik valley, the coastal people of northern New Ireland who participate in the malanggan ceremonial complex, the Baining

of the mountains of New Britain's Gazelle Peninsula, the Star Harbour-Santa Ana crafters in southeastern San Cristobal of the eastern Solomons Republic, and the Big Nambas of northern Malekula island in recently-created Vanuatu.

This research also will attempt to uncover criteria for an art tradition to remain viable within a cultural environment. Such information may provide an approach to determine the future of traditional art in Melanesia--and in other world areas with populations living in a traditional living pattern: Africa, Polynesia, and Southeast Asia.

What precisely qualifies as "traditional art"? Naturally, not all the art presently made in Melanesia (see Map 1) merits this classification. May (1975:125) offers the notion that any "true traditional art" is that which is created within a society for religious, secular, or trading purposes. Some art historians (Kaeppeler 1979:185) would not consider any art after European contact to be traditional; an "evolved traditional art" may possess new implements or innovations (metal carving tools), but could generally follow along an indigenous line of natural development and be used quite normally in a traditional sense without deviation. Arts that do continue to be made for local use appear to split into two distinctive varieties (Graburn 1979:362)--evolved traditional arts for present-day tribal societies and fine arts for non-tribal citizens.

Sieber defines "traditional art" (1978) as art "made in the right place, by the right people, for their own use."

One consideration apparently germinated through this discussion is the matter of relating traditional arts with primitive art. Are they

the same? Most of the cultures to be assessed for possibilities of traditional artistic expression could be considered "primitive"--should we take an honest, and not an ethnocentric approach. If primitive art is not to be evaluated by external standards as "inferior" or "crude" (Wingert 1962:5-11), we must realize that the objects held up for appraisal come from cultural environments which display fundamental, basic, and essential drives of life more openly than what is normal for a Westernized living experience. And once this is understood (or at least attempted), the related error in perceiving that primitive cultures "borrowed" styles from "higher" cultures--making their final products sort of a backwash, from this flawed line of "reasoning"--can, and should, be avoided.

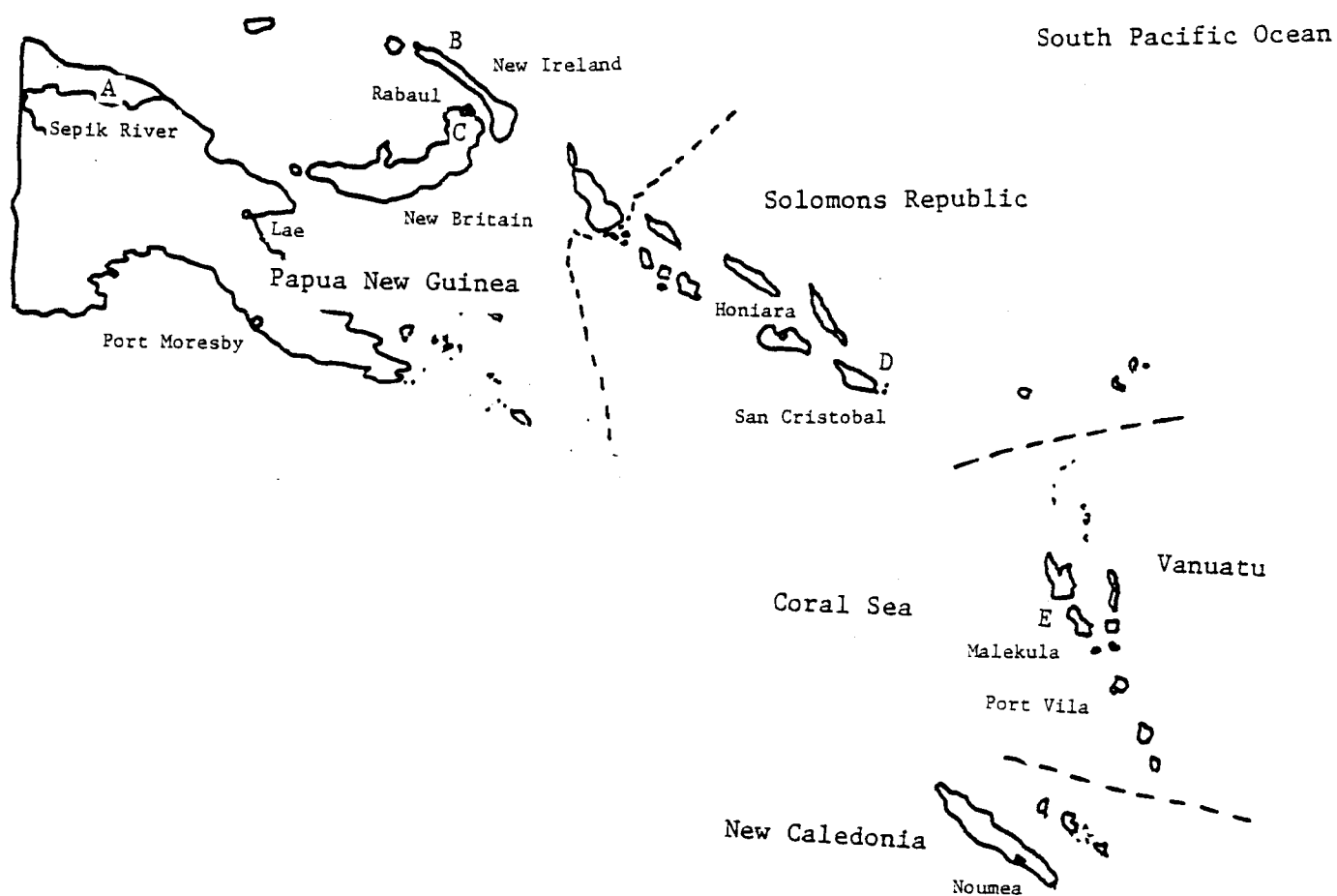
If primitive art is considered to be a valid synonym for traditional art, at least within the limited scope of this research, we must further elaborate on the intentions of primitive art. Did primitive arts deserve the observed conclusions of early investigators, who laid out the long-revered idea (Fraser 1962:15) that primitive arts did not respond to standards of aesthetics but merely served the needs of the society with which they were associated? Such an approach in research came from the work of Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, and Powdermaker, all of whom visualized the primitive artist as a repeater of a socially-accepted version of reality. Primitive art usually was community art, for purposes of initiation, commemoration, religious expression and interpretation, but to dwell on function ignores the emotional capacity of the primitive artist for self-expression (Muensterberger 1971:7-8) and a tendency for exhibitionism to gain prestige. Masks and other ritualistic

implements (Sieber 1966:258) functioned for ceremonies, but they were simultaneously recognized as containing traditional secrets which were captured in the material, yet expressed through the efforts of the artist entrusted to their completion.

Art objects acting as social restraints seldom brought forth a reaction from investigators that primitive art actually operated as "art for life's sake" (Davidson 1969:160). Too often art pieces were evaluated by attempting to dissect the object from its cultural environment; the beliefs and values almost seemed to "impede" an appreciation of the art itself. Primitive art generally was regarded as "functional art," where the point of function was stressed to the point of making it a defining factor (Goldwater 1973:6-8). But in this definition, setting primitive art seemingly apart from other art categories, the role for aesthetics¹ was not denied but actually confirmed. The narcissistic notion of "art for art's sake" actually metamorphosizes into a case where idealistically the art would be completely divorced from all other concerns of the respective society--such an ethnocentric implication does not hold true for real primitive, or traditional, art. The art created is the art of the people, and the artist realizes this in the course of his crafting.

¹Goldwater intends to avoid the concern of seeking aesthetics, where "aesthetics" equal "beauty" in the Western art sense (1973:8).

- A. Middle Sepik (Iatmul)
- B. Northern New Ireland (Malanggan)
- C. Gazelle Peninsula (Baining)
- D. Star Harbour (Star Harbour-Santa Ana)
- E. Northern Malekula (Big Nambas)



Map 1. Nations of Melanesia

II. EXAMPLES OF VIABLE TRADITIONAL ART IN MELANESIAN CULTURES

A. The Iatmul: Transition along the Sepik

The Iatmul people live along the banks of the middle Sepik River in the contemporary East Sepik Province of Papua New Guinea. Besides sustaining on crocodiles and sago pith, the Iatmul formerly centered their lives around their tambaran houses, which served as combined men's houses and dwelling places for the tambaran spirits (Gardi 1960:4). This spirit world and the related activity of headhunting had provided stimulus for the richly-expressive sculpture of the region, one of many along the Sepik (Forge 1973:169) which has received world-wide attention for the quality of its drums, debating stools, suspension hooks, costume masks, and utilitarian items. The avalanche of material transformation present in the Sepik Valley has produced the often-repeated desires by primitive peoples who wish to participate in the modern world (Kirk 1973:355). These peoples desire motorboats, canned goods, radios, and money to purchase themselves out of a living style which no longer holds purpose for them. The actual challenge in determining the present situation for art along the Iatmul section of the mid-Sepik is not so much to separate the tourist-oriented pieces from the remaining tambaran images (which retain secular village value) as it is to establish whether the beliefs have crumbled along with the tambaran houses and the art.

The Iatmul were formerly headhunters, having been suppressed in this activity by the Australian colonial authorities prior to the Second World

War. Bateson (1936:3-6) reported on the social complexity of the Iatmul naven socio-religious system--an activity which sought to honor the achievements of the laua (sister's child). During his time of fieldwork, the Iatmul were apparently still very involved in their spirit beliefs. Primary spirits were the wagan, which included Kava-mbuangg--who supposedly created the dry land from the mud of the Sepik by placing his foot upon the soggy earth (Bateson 1936:233; Poignant 1967:88). The scholarly observation is not so much that spirits could relate to mythological origins, but that they permeated the fabric of Sepik village society, represented both the living and the dead, and were differentiated by their functions: shamanic, avenging, or inhabiting community spirit receptacles like slit gongs, mwai masks, and mbwatnggowi figures. (The latter were ceremonial dolls made by incorporating ancestral skulls [Bateson 1936:233] to ensure fertility and proper initiation for candidates.) Objects which may have hosted wagan spirits (mwai masks, mbwatnggowi images, sacred flutes) were typically restricted to the care of village elders. Tambaran houses had the capacity to instill fear and respect in the non-qualified persons who might be foolish enough to attempt and glean the House of Men's secrets.

But to overemphasize this secluded notion related to the nature of the mid-Sepik tambaran houses (Attenborough 1976:111-112) disguises the true intention for the world of Sepik art. The pieces created did not merely indicate the presence of a spirit realm--they acted as communicative media for the inhabitants (Forge 1973:191). The expression of spirit content, along with a noted originality of composition and vigorous appeal, are distinctive features of Sepik creations (Wingert 1962:197).

The temptation to seek out a homogeneity for this art does no service to the efforts of the Sepik artists. Such a fruitless quest brings to light a realization that the Sepik provides an excellent example of a people escaping stereotyped classification through the ingenuity of their artworks. Guiart stressed further that such a society developed a highly competitive art tradition--one which valued innovations, lifting an artist's status through his creative efforts (1968:7-11). Men had the opportunity to carve pieces for collective use, in association with the tambaran. The personal and psychological nature of these works solidified one's bond with the functioning community and the spirit world; to succeed in good representations appears to have demanded the investing of emotion as well as originality from the prospective artist.

Understanding the satisfaction gained from skillfully fashioning a debating stool, gable-mask, or suspension hook dovetails with comprehending why finished products--out of mundane materials like wood, clay, shell, feathers, tusks, and human hair--become sacred and powerful ritual objects (Forge 1979:279-284). This type of indigenous art was never performed merely because it was "the way to do it"--the complexity ran much deeper in inter-connecting established means for expression with a certain amount of self-induced creativeness. Guiart (1968:24) parallels Forge in identifying the Sepik as a major area for inter-regional connections that stimulated a richness of potential models for artistic persons to emulate.

Change then will come in Sepik arts²--Forge considers that a style will be maintained (1979:281) if it functions for its respective culture

²Bernard Narokobi in "The Arts of the People," Papua New Guinea Post-Courier (1979:4-5) considers that it is unreasonable to expect art

and serves to preserve and transmit features of the cultural environment. If we consider the level of art produced before and after Western contact, it would seem to indicate (Guiart 1973:95) that artistic creativity had reached a peak until external forces began affecting the world and the mental perspective of the artists. The change that will come can be controlled to some extent or even completely submerged, but what specifically happens to the respected pieces in the process?

Gardi forecasted a continued dying nature for the arts of the Sepik peoples, evaluating that the new creations could scarcely be compared with the older and more valued pieces (1960:101). Such a diagnosis is not a recent insight, for Lewis (1951:190) observed that much of the arts had deteriorated, becoming no longer "labors of love" but tourist pieces, seldom made with the care bestowed upon older ones.

What about the impact of tourism? May (1975:125) weighed this and decided that visitors can influence local art production through their demands for souvenirs, but that tourists are only one feature of external acculturation and are not committed (as would be formal government programs) to altering traditional lifestyles. Tourism may, in fact, contribute to local cultural preservation through its expressed interest in the indigenous representational arts.

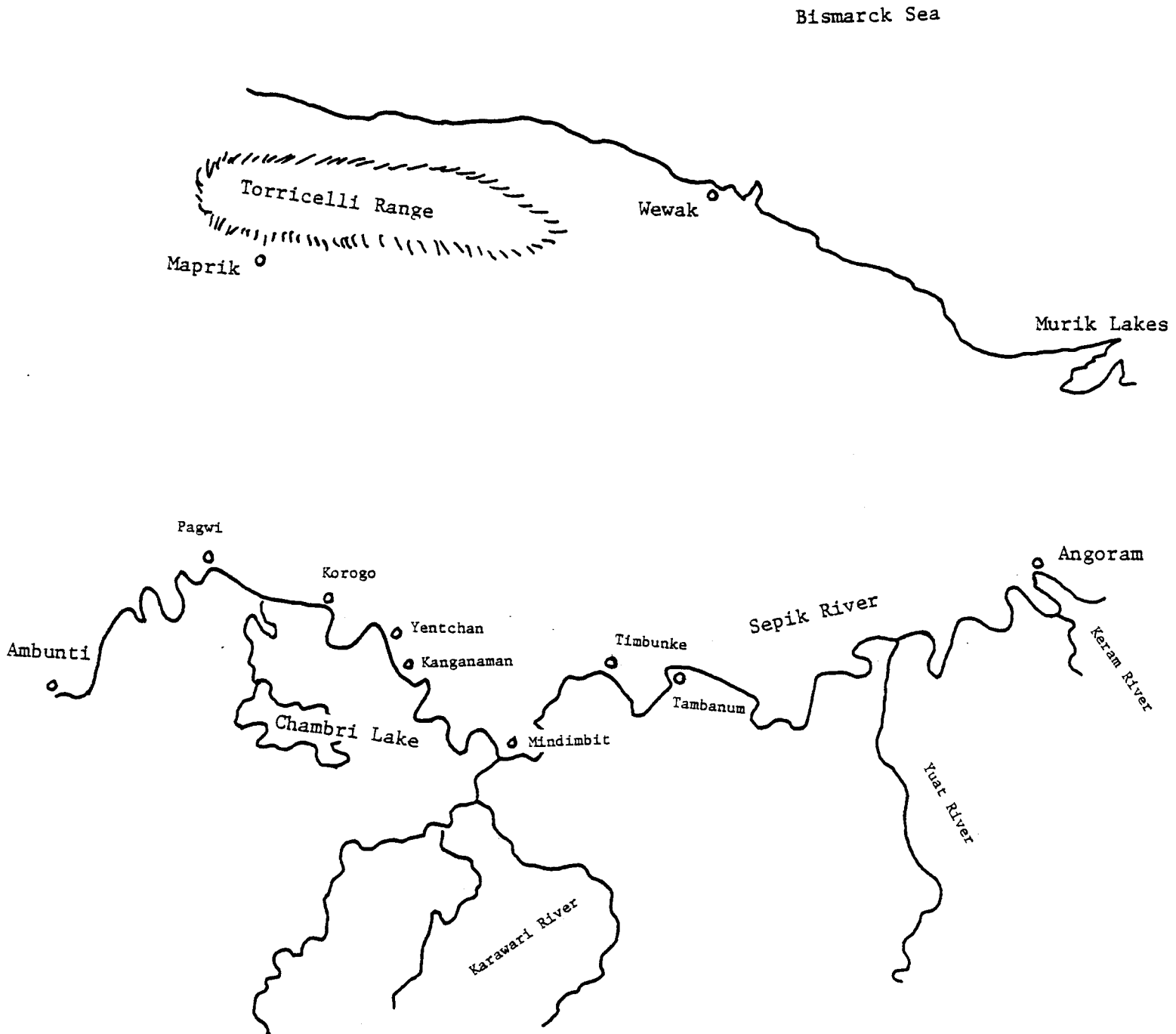
This, however, should not be interpreted as claiming that tourism is only beneficial to surviving cultures. The mwai masks of Korogo illustrate a masking tradition which originally was intricately tied to

traditions not to change. If change does occur, it will come if the utility or purpose of the change is clearly established to the adopting cultural group.

rituals but gradually developed into a desired tourist item for purchase (Attenborough 1976:124-125). The fact that occasional visitors to the Sepik procured a mwai mask or two did no damage to the credibility of the pieces. The mass flow of casual visitors which began in the 1960s, however, sought out samples of Melanesian wood sculpture and showed preference for the mwais--with their elongated noses, human hair inlaid above bands of shells, opposed boar's tusks, and shell-disc eyes. The more "primitive-appearing" a mask, the better chance it seemingly had being sold to a customer who usually had no perception of the traditional significance for the object. The contemporary masks produced are presented to buyers in vast quantities, with few conforming to any established criteria. The few which retain some local veneration for the villagers are not replaced as eagerly as the tourist pieces, bringing forth the charge (not an unreasonable one) that curio art has created a "bastardizing" of traditional art forms to satisfy tourists' peculiar penchants (May 1975:126). Overlooked, though, is the undeniable reality that the tourist-art market provides an income for individuals of a cash-poor region (true for parts of the Sepik, where there is little opportunity to earn money other than by carving).

Change has long been a familiar element in the lives of the Iatmul, but could it be that too much removal of activities from the indigenous past has robbed them of the creative force which yielded the incredible multitude of art pieces (Diole 1976:57)? The transformation in merely the last decade³ reveals cultural systems all along the Sepik which hold to

³ Preferring to remain anonymous, an art collector and dealer of Sepik art pieces revealed to me that the change in ten years had been enormous along the Sepik; motor-powered canoes are commonplace and tourists make stops at specially-selected carving villages like Korogo and Kanganaman.



Map 2. Central Sepik Region of East Sepik Province,
Papua New Guinea

some vestiges of their art-producing past yet show reluctance to participate in the established rituals because of conflict with cash-cropping (Kirk 1973:361-364). The sculpted objects of the Iatmul are in a precarious position at present--the people who desire to preserve them cannot be certain that they will not be visualized as simply commodities for easy money by one who wants to purchase an outboard motor for his canoe. Will Korogo become a locality for the sole purpose of creating commercial mwai masks, will Kanganaman become only a center for mass-produced suspension hooks, will Timbunke only yield debating stool figures in the future for passengers of the Melanesian Explorer?

Decisions will have to be made by the Middle Sepik peoples in determining if their art is to remain functional and active for their religious background--one which has been eroded by the influences of the Christian and Roman Catholic missions--or to be regarded as an exploitable resource.

B. Northern New Ireland: Re-genesis of the Malanggan?

The region of northern New Ireland has received artistic attention for decades due to the unique structure and elaborately sculpted and painted images associated with malanggan ceremonies. The importance of this artistically-embellished institution is no new discovery; Groves (1936:223) observed that to attempt to study the culture of New Ireland without comprehending malanggan would be a futile exercise. Such a system depended on community participation for it to succeed and continue to be vital to the interests of a village, and this made it particularly vulnerable to external community activities which would drain the manpower needed to accumulate the pigs and other foods needed for the feasts and

especially supply the artistic creativity required to keep the art works alive. Powdermaker's research in Lesu (1933) and the more recent probings by Lewis (1969) provided indications that the malanggan complex was dying out due to local neglect. Lewis's 1973 report on the replacement of carved wooden images by concrete burial markers in New Ireland almost had the tone of an obituary.

The malanggan ceremonial system has operated as a strong binding force for the inhabitants of coastal northern New Ireland villages and hamlets. During her observation of the malanggan rites for Lesu, Powdermaker (1933:135-138) reported that while the pigs and taro were being procured about ten months in advance of the festivals, the carvers soon after began work, being supervised by the persons who would display the malanggan pieces (Powdermaker 1933:103). The intention of the malanggan pieces traditionally was to honor recently deceased individuals through the creation and public displaying of the images, decorated with representations of fish, birds, and flowers, coupled with a prolonged community memorial activity (Groves 1936:236). When a person decides to honor a relative recently deceased, the public setting seems to dictate having the best quality work poured into the malanggan. The overall celebration may also include boys' initiation and constitutes a time for those seeking prestige to make stronger claims through their commemorative efforts (Lomas 1979:58). A patron takes pains to have a proper malanggan constructed and painted, and this usually involves acquiring a skilled carver's services, financial support from the clan of the deceased (but not necessarily, because assistance could come from a non-clan individual), and the rights to reproduce a malanggan in a certain manner--including the

designs and accompanying rites for this particular malanggan (Powdermaker 1933:211-213).

Malanggan ceremonial activities involved a complex cycle of events, which occurred during Powdermaker's fieldwork over a period of eight months, from May, 1929, lasting through to January, 1930 (Powdermaker 1933:135). The first major event was the construction of the ceremonial enclosure out of split bamboo; this coincided with circumcision of boys⁴ seeking initiation. Lewis outlined the malanggan ceremonial stages in his research (1969:46-47) when he undertook an investigation in the same general area in 1954, following up on Powdermaker's earlier views with his own attempt to discover to what extent malanggan remained a functional element in the ceremonial realm of the Lesu peoples.

While he sought to elaborate further on the complexity of the malanggan ceremonial rituals, Lewis simultaneously discovered that the activity cycle had diminished in the time allotted for the festivals. This resulted from external laboring for wages or from local copra cash-cropping. Lewis was still able to gain insights into a traditional malanggan festival: the enclosure erection, noted by Powdermaker, was labelled the Kombutai, which soon was followed by the Suakaukau--the period for initiation candidates to be circumcised. While the initiates were secluded, feasts and dancing were initiated. The carving of the malanggan images for presentation, the Giragira, had commenced and continued all during this time, being climaxed by the symbolic painting

⁴Powdermaker (1933:135) comments that the days for seclusion during the boys' initiation were arranged so as not to conflict with the mission schools.

of the carved pieces--the Atali Malanggan. Red, black, white, blue, and yellow pigments were applied by the commissioned malanggan creator to retell artistically the events of the deceased. No one but the patron could view the malanggan as it was being fashioned (Powdermaker 1933:190). The completion of the display sheds, the Tsoa pu-anua, had them constructed adjacent to community burial grounds to invoke the ancestral spirits' presence in the ceremonies. Arranged at right angles to the long shed where the boys had undergone initiation, the display sheds soon received the finished malanggan pieces, set up during the Atup Malanggan phase.

The actual displaying of the completed malanggan works, the Luzi Malanggan, occurred when the thatched front walls of the structures were removed for public viewing. Always present was a wooden block in the center of the displayed malanggans, upon which was placed tsera, an ornamented shell currency to pay the carvers and the sponsoring patrons for the viewing (Powdermaker 1933:208). After the Susuinbura, the rejoining process, where the initiation candidates were reunited as men with their families, the malanggan ceremonies were concluded by the final feast and rituals--the Tsinul. Disposal of the carvings in the forest soon followed (this was when Lewis and other investigators chose to obtain samples of malanggan art; the carvings were no longer revered since the newly-initiated men had formally replaced the deceased who had been honored during the process of the ceremonies). Lewis documented from his 1954 research a sad observation that malanggan rituals were losing ground to non-traditional enterprises (1969:164). This local cultural decline reflected, and continues to illustrate, the break-up of community

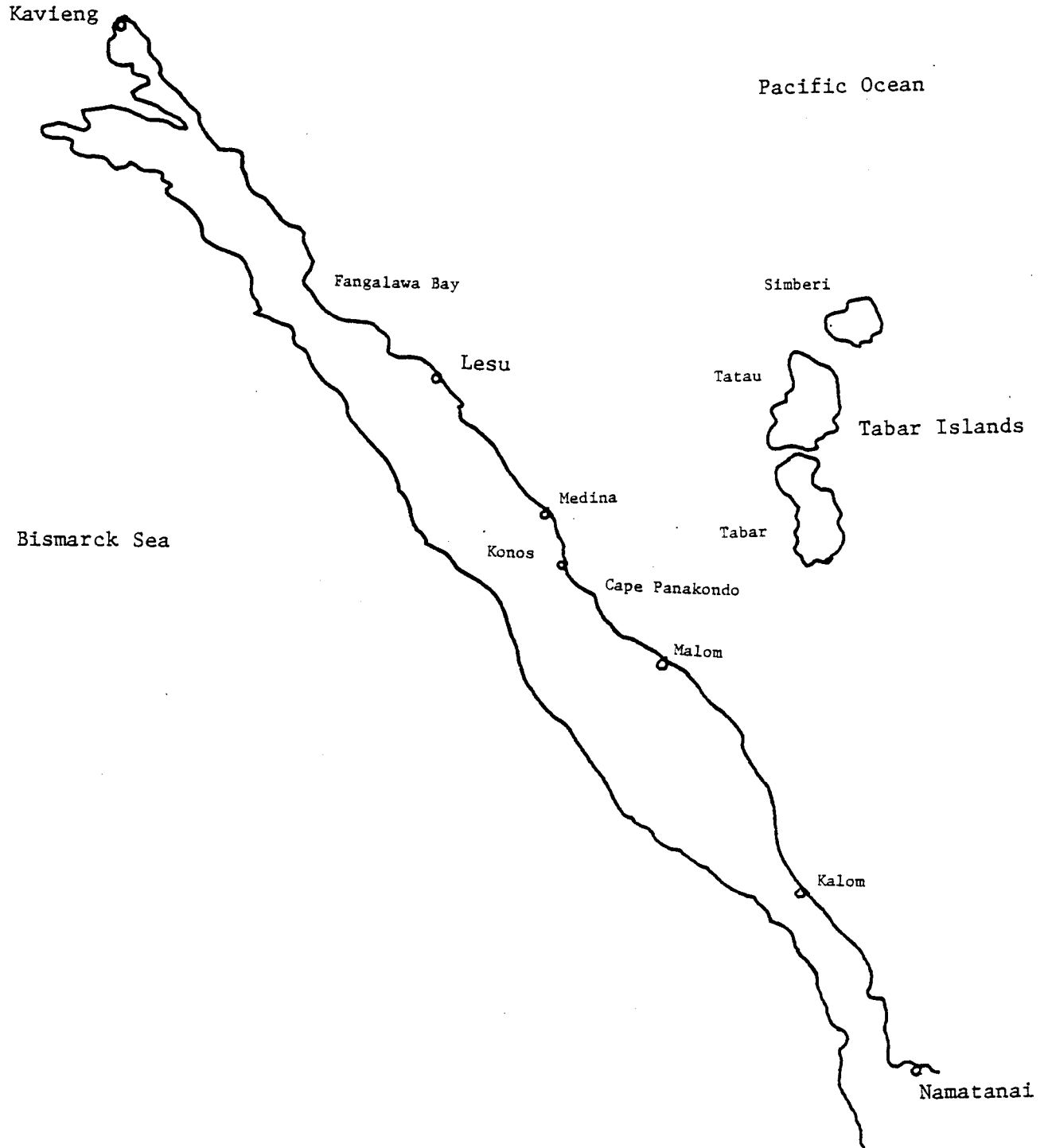
cohesion caused by laborers migrating to other regions of Papua New Guinea. His verification research reported that few areas had experienced malanggan carvers in 1970, few persons could recall the older processes used to create the display pieces, and outside of the relatively isolated Tabar islands almost no localities were observing malanggan ceremonies in 1970 (Lewis 1973:143). The external pressure of modern schooling and government jobs made a deeper rift between the indigenous lifestyles of the coastal communities and the urbanized New Irelanders in Kavieng or Namatanai. As an additional desire for permanence grew, some New Irelanders took to laying out cement funerary markers, smels, as a replacement for malanggan. The overall attitude expressed by some sources is that malanggan images and rituals cannot survive this century as an active social process. If it will survive at all it will do so only through memory and appreciation (Ryan 1972:677).

The threat of malanggan permanently fading from the socio-religious activities of New Irelanders was countered by a deep indigenous awareness and high regard for this impressive art tradition (Lewis 1969:168). Lewis has traced a re-emergence of malanggan carving, resulting from rekindled local interest in the cultural history of New Ireland (1979:379-380). Memory of the social framework in which malanggan previously operated is expressed in the reaction and reluctance by many carvers to create pieces purely for sale, fearing the supernatural sanctions of the ceremonial context. Lomas suggests (1979:53-54) that malanggan could have another reason for its being retained, from the fact that local land is controlled through leaders and custom. This suggests that malanggan could--and probably still does--function as a mechanism for transferring

land rights from one generation to the next. By this type of formal process, the ones who could demonstrate the strongest support from others through their community efforts would possess the weightiest entitlements to disputed property. If malanggan continues to survive as an effective forum of land, it will additionally signify that sponsorship and participation in the mortuary ceremonies will remain as primary criteria for persons wishing public support from these ceremonies (Lomas 1979:65) to bolster their claims.

If Lomas has correctly proposed a functional purpose for the malanggan ceremonial complex to survive, Lewis adds that rebuilding of the old taberau stone enclosures (where the malanggans were fashioned) and a movement to revive hamlet burials would assist in revitalizing the malanggan works (1979:387-389). The making of secular pieces and the related revival of sacred ceremonial rites connected to the malanggan complex would be accurate indicators that this revival, if it is one, actually has validity. But one may wonder if displaying photographs of past creations and noting possibilities for rites to employ malanggan works will revitalize the tradition. A few carvers still persist in malanggan works;⁵ should the ceremonial system become active, it will be because both the art-producing context and the social environment of the northern New Ireland peoples desire to stimulate the tradition's rebirth.

⁵Ben Sisia of Liba village and Michael Homarang are two contemporary malanggan carvers singled out in "The Arts of the People" (1979: 21, 37).



Map 3. Northern New Ireland Province, Papua New Guinea

C. The Baining: Resilience of the Dance Masks

The Baining peoples in the interior of New Britain's Gazelle Peninsula number approximately 6,000 to 8,000. They exist through hunting, gathering, gardening, and more recently, plantation labor on the numerous copra, coffee, and cocoa plantings in the region (Corbin 1976:9-11). An ethnic group⁶ with at one time almost 15-20 subgroups, who have competed with each other for land--as well as with the neighboring Tolai and Sulka peoples--the contemporary Baining have long resisted efforts to pull them into the modern world. Their living patterns, and consequently their traditional art, reflect their defiant indigenous attitude.

Initial contacts probably were made with the Baining by the German entrepreneurs of the 1880s, but there was no overt reaction to this alien presence until the 1904 Baining uprising. Hempenstall (1975:11) assesses that this outbreak of hostilities, climaxed by the massacre of the Sacred Heart mission, resulted in a rebellion of revenge; the Baining retaliated through terrorism because of the imposition of an unfamiliar (and apparently non-desired) lifestyle through mission work. They could not be tied down to a life of village drudgery and resentment at this enforced regimentation and the eventual suppression of the revolt left the Baining with an unsavory reputation which did not fade even with the field observations of Read (1931), Bateson (1932), and Poole (1943).

⁶The name "Baining" means "wild people who live in the bush," but this nomenclature comes from the Tolai and perhaps illustrates the animosity remaining between these two cultures (Corbin 1976:9). The Baining refer to themselves as "the people"; major divisions are Northwest (Chachet), Central (Kairak and Uramot), Southeast (Mali), and Southern (Asimbali and Mokolkol).

Elkin commented as recently as 1953 that no good anthropological survey on the Baining had yet appeared (1953:98). The primary concern for most investigators of the Baining has been focused on the massive display pieces and dance masks employed in their ceremonial repertoire. Surprisingly, for a people who have received so much attention because of their expressive masks and display images, so little is actually understood, in regard to the ritualistic significance of the objects to the Baining.

The true importance for Baining art within its own indigenous context was difficult for the early researchers to grasp. Read notes that during his time of study the Central Baining were shifting their settlements within proximity to European communities (1931:232). The night ceremonies were prepared with great secrecy, for he was able to photograph the dance masks only through great persuasion (Read 1931:233). Features associated with Baining dance rituals--such as the last-minute revelation of the dance site location, the seclusion of the dwelling within which the masks were prepared, food being stockpiled for the accompanying feast, and the electrifying build-up of tension which erupted with the entrance of the first masked fire dancer--were all similarly recorded by Bateson. A more trained ethnographer than Read, Bateson distinguished the regular dance masks--assembled by tapa being placed on a bamboo framework and then painted red and black in expressive facial concentric designs--from the trumpet-like composite pieces used in the ceremonies (1932:335). But even more essential to Bateson than the descriptions of the art objects was the meaning employed by the Baining, which he sought but could supply little more insight than

Read, who assumes (1931:236) that they signified agricultural rituals or death cults. Bateson offers the possibility (1932:337) that the dances could have been performed to honor ancestors; he could not verify this, for he observed that the Baining were not easy people to research--eager to display their dances and masks, but not to openly discuss their intimate ritual meanings to outsiders. Even at this early period of investigation, Bateson expressed the apprehension over European contact being a force to erode the dance ceremonies of the Baining (1932:341).

The research of a missionary's wife, Jean Poole, revealed new directions for the Baining dances. Poole concentrated not only in the Central Baining country around Malabunga village--the Central region where both Read and Bateson had worked--but revealed the Northwest Baining ceremonial activities in the villages of Kulit and Malaseit. Poole expanded knowledge of the scope of the dances (1943:226), noting that day dances were in operation along with the previously-reported night ceremonies. The daytime rites supposedly served as particular ones to each village--held separately and with specific variations in every locality. At night, however, the activity of the dances and feasting served to merge all the Baining villages together.

Terminology for the masks and elaborate pieces have seldom been agreed upon by researchers; Bateson (1932:335) simply labels masks lacking suspended frames as kavat, while the name vwungvwung covers all composite masks with visible frameworkings (and occasionally a trumpet attached to the frame). Poole follows this line of nomenclature, offering no reason for these particular names to be used for the masking objects. A new feature of the dances also appeared, the conical mask

termed lingan⁷ (Poole 1943:224). She notes the introduction of the lingan element at the Malaseit village night ceremony where the dancer bearing the lingan mask-headcrest initiated the procession of the dancers around the fire. Why it emerged as a masking style around the time of Poole's 1941 field study, however, was left to speculation.

The Baining did not hesitate to incorporate new motifs⁸ into their art. Bateson saw a pack of playing cards painted into a tapa cloth pattern for masks (1932:338), along with common motifs of opossums, flowers, pig's vertebrae, and fruit clusters. The Baining do not balk at experimenting or introducing new features to further embellish their art. Why certain representations have been selected investigators can offer no clear explanation. The fact that the Baining did borrow foreign elements to be employed as decorative features for their masks apparently has not diminished community enthusiasm for their dancing ceremonies.

Over a decade after Bateson's observations (1932:340-341), Poole comments (1943:225) on the efforts put into creating the masks and setting up for the feasting and dances; Baining art was still vibrant and functioning for the people. Despite the mystery draped over the actual preparation of the masks and the gloomy, nocturnal setting which

⁷ Poole speculates on the possibility that the lingan headdress could have been adopted from the adjacent Sulka people (1943:224); so does Corbin (1976:96). This appears dubious, though, since Corbin (1976:11) reminds us that the Sulka are regarded--as are the Tolai--as traditional enemies.

⁸ Corbin reports (1976:65) witnessing a Northwest Baining helmet mask (tutki) which had painted on it the impression of a military helicopter, a common sight in the Gazelle Peninsula as they fly on patrols.

was further enhanced by musical accompaniment and the fire-mesmerizing prior to the explosive introduction of the masked dancers, Baining dances have not operated like secret society gatherings, but rather more like community celebrations. But what precisely do they honor?

The intellectual quagmire of dispute over the true purpose for the Baining dances additionally overshadows a proper understanding of the masks. The masks possess jutting foreheads, open-mouthed snouts with tongue-like protrusions, and massive, seemingly-transfixing concentric eyes painted onto the tapa surface--but the associated meanings for the masks and ceremonies in general from investigators involve little more than guesswork. The celebration of a child's birth or the completion of a new home (Linton and Wingert 1946:150-151) are educated guesses. It is apparent that the Baining masks have long provided indications of serving as unifying elements through their manipulation during the dancing ceremonies (ceremonies that have followed a common pattern in Melanesia of possessing dramatic build-up peaking to intense expectancy, climaxed by the entrance of the masked figures).

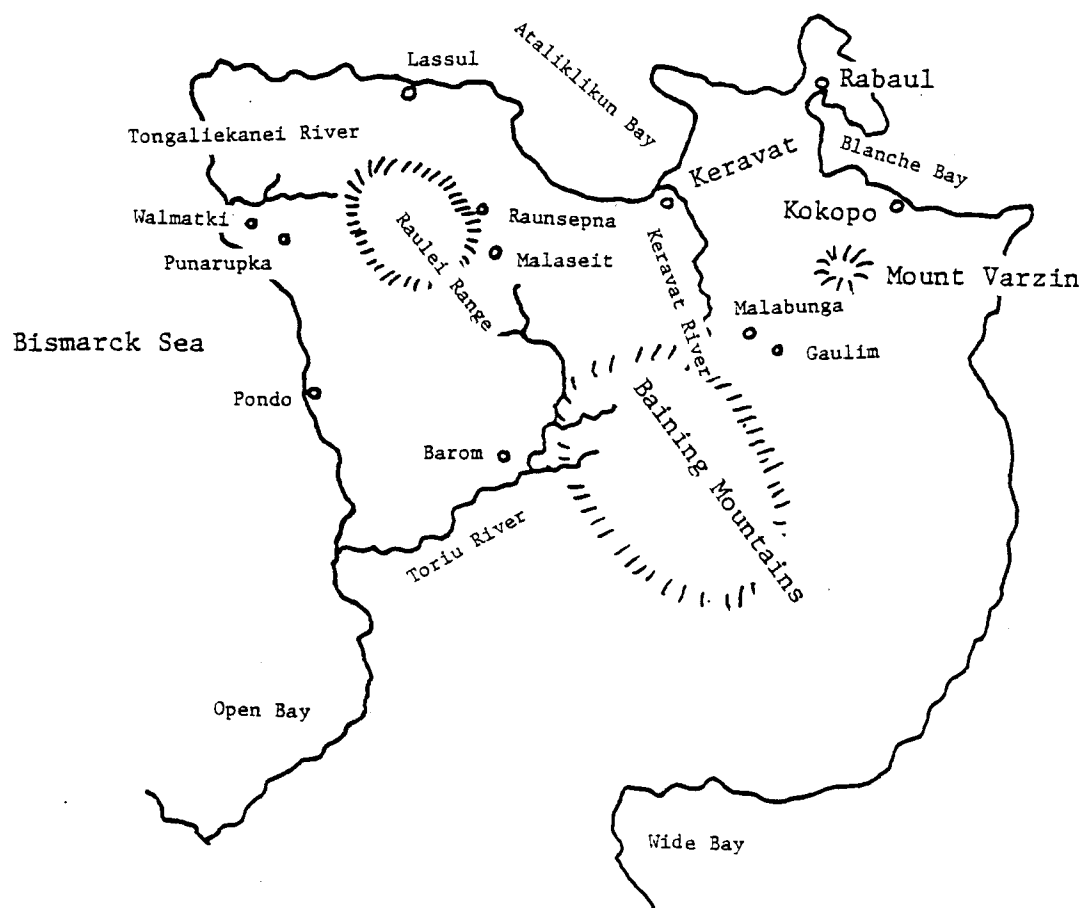
Recent revelations on the subject of the Baining masks and their significance surface from Corbin (1976:112). In comparing the degree of change for the masking styles of the Chachet (Northwest) Baining and the Kairak and Uramot (Central) Baining, he proposed that the perishable art of the Baining serves to articulate their entire sphere of existence --an existence where ceremony and art seem to condense and visually express all significant meanings of the Baining culture. The eventual transformation of Baining expression was no new phenomenon, for Corbin suggests (1976:32) that one abandoned innovation was the construction of

the colossal hareiga display pieces. Confined mainly to the Chachet area, the creation of hareiga had faded before the turbulence created by the nineteenth-century Tolai invasions and undoubtedly also by the German colonial presence. Land pressures and the European influence somehow accelerated the creation of new features, the lingan and the oggeroggeruk dance mask (utilized in Chachet day ceremonies). Corbin provides further evidence of a regional flow of Baining artistic creativity, suggesting that such new elements responded to acculturation from the Central villages of Gaulim and Malabunga through Malaseit to the Northwest centers like Wilembemki and Punarupka (1976:57). Since Poole had observed in 1941 the emergence of the lingan in the Malaseit village night ceremony, the evidence points to this village as a probable center for cultural transference between the Central and Northwest Baining groups.

This also suggests to indicate that the Central Baining are likely to initiate a new innovation and then pass it on to the Northwest. But surprisingly, although the Central Baining have known the most external contact (Corbin 1979:173), they have retained more of their traditional stylistic forms than have those of the Chachet. Baining mask themes (used by all subgroups) illustrate a wealth of animals common to their living experience: lowengi (flying fox), blamdi (wild boar), quanki (bush bird), serikka (freshwater fish), and merangga (hornbill). Along with animals and vegetation, Corbin (1976:64-65) identifies the Surugga (wise old man) theme to indicate at times Rigenmucha, the creator god. The mask efforts of the Baining become more elaborate and decorated with abstract designs as we proceed geographically from the Northwest to the Central.

As to the meanings, notions have resurfaced (Corbin 1976:28) that the dance masks imitated spirits of the dead (death was never seen as a natural event, but as a result of evil spirits). Corbin observed in both the Central and Northwest night dances--where the sequence of dancers was identical: the lingan, followed by kavat wearers, and then the composite helmet masks (vungvung or vwungvwung)--that the night ceremony culminates the initiation of youths and marks the departure of Damki and Dam (the mythical tribal father and mother) toward the southern equinox (1976:94-95). Snakes, actually pythons, have been reported since Read and Bateson first observed the dances in the late 1920s and symbolize re-birth through shedding of their skins. A dualism of Baining life is related through the art: the day art represents female activities (gardening) and represents the order by which the fruits of the day are obtained, while the night art relates to chaotic actions of the bush spirits and the lives of men (who primarily hunt, fish, and gather). But if the day and night ceremonies appear to embody the contrasting activities of men and women, they more importantly serve as a cohesive and binding force for the Baining people (Corbin 1979:113-114).

The most vital consideration for the present is: whether the masks and their associated dances will continue to operate as a community-linking force for the Baining? All indications given an image of the decorative art as an essential facet of indigenous ceremonial traditions, which despite some commercial variations for the benefit of visitors do not appear to be in danger of becoming extinct in purpose or in creative vitality. When the final dancer moves off into the bush before sunrise, it signifies not an ending but rather a beginning, and perhaps it is the



Map 4. Gazelle Peninsula of East New Britain Province, Papua New Guinea

creative urges put into the Baining masks--as well as the unity produced by the dances--which explain why this ceremonial complex remains the ceremonial crescendo of the Baining culture.

D. Star Harbour: Eclipsing of the Bonito Cult

The eastern islands of the Solomons Republic traditionally centered their community activities and subsequently their representative art on the honoring of a bonito cult. Reported nearly a half-century ago by Fox (1925) and Ivens (1927), the ritualistic institution involved the initiation of youths (Mead 1973b:72-73) and the sculpting of appropriate ceremonial items by recognized craftsmen: custom house posts, bone caskets in the form of sharks or bonito canoes, ceremonial vessels, and the actual bonito canoes or againiwaiau (which formerly were used to transport the initiates in search of their first bonito). The overall context in which this art was created has altered (Davenport 1971:383), but the works still are produced to advance a promising carver into a highly respected status (Mead 1979:294). For the purpose of this paper, the attention is focused on the Star Harbour region of southeastern San Cristobal, which includes the harbor and Surville Peninsula of San Cristobal and the tiny islands of Santa Ana and Santa Catalina.

The sculpture of this region traditionally had been associated with the maraufu initiation ceremony for youths, emerging from supernatural associations with the bonito--the most important food fish, which seemingly encapsulated the entire scope of the islanders' existence. Schools of bonito not only provided the primary food source, they additionally attracted sharks and frigate birds (Davenport 1971:408), creatures which reflected the unpredictable and sometimes dangerous nature of the sea

deities. And the bonito was believed to draw in all these qualities through its presence. Small wonder that a burning ambition of Star Harbour inhabitants was either to gain a solid reputation for catching bonito or to demonstrate sculptural potentialities by manipulating blackened wood and slivers of nautilus shell into representations of the ocean world.

What caused the alteration in the lives of the Star Harbour peoples and shifted emphasis in their carvings? Mead targeted the collapse of the overseas raidings (1973b:93) as a primary factor; the establishment of formal government in the Solomon Islands in the late nineteenth century resulted in suppression of slave-raids, by which the peoples--particularly those of Santa Ana--acquired shell money to purchase quantities of taro, yams, and pigs to supplement what little food could be produced on their tiny islands. The changing lifestyles may already have been apparent to Fox, when he speculated on the rapid disappearance of the Santa Ana peoples (1925:6). The opposite situation developed, however, from the introduction of Christianity to the islands: the population swelled from 360 in Fox's time to around 800 residents in 1971, and did not include members of the Santa Ana clans residing elsewhere but occasionally visiting the island (Mead 1973b:82). Such pressures place unattainable demands on the island's resources for food--nothing new for the peoples of Santa Ana but simply accelerated through increased births and drifting migrant labor to other parts of the Solomons. One means for a person to gain money is to carve, using models from the repertoire of the cultural past.

Mead (1979:307-308) assessed the efforts of several Star Harbour men who have been striving to attain the status of mwane manira, master carvers. The mastering of traditional forms like sacrificial bowls and shark caskets leads to a craftsman's becoming recognized publicly for the skill in his work and therefore commanding higher prices for his finished pieces. Despite some rebellion by younger carvers against reproducing images of a non-functional nature, the ceremonial bowls (apira) and shark caskets for remains (airi) remain alive in the island scene--although many are purchased by art collectors or museums.

All the works of the Star Harbour region traditionally envisioned the symbolic rapport man desired with the sea and its related deities, factors which controlled the very survival of the islands. Even fishing floats and panels illustrated this relationship--in many objects, man actually became transformed into a semi-sea deity with physical attributes of bonito, porpoise, shark, or frigate bird. A mental linkage supposedly between the deity and the carver transmits the type of sacrificial bowl to be created; to the best of the carver's ability the bowl should embody the supernatural details desired by both the person who commissions the apira bowl and the deity represented (Davenport 1971:422).

Human bone containers may have originated as simple objects fashioned from vines, or more complex model canoes or airi shark caskets. Some of the caskets were decorated by carvings representing human figures being devoured by or transformed into sharks. These carvings visually related the legend of Karemanua who bit his brother in half and later became a shark (Mead 1973a:16-18). Once a deceased person's skull was placed in

a small side panel of the casket, he became transformed into a shark-spirit and was worshipped by his relatives as such, while the rest of the deceased's bones often were laid to rest in a model of the bonito fishing canoe--the cycle from initiation to the spirit world now having been completed.

During the maraufu initiation ceremony a boy candidate had to be bloodied by his first bonito catch,⁹ hugging it to his body, even drinking the blood to assume the beneficial qualities of the fish (Mead 1973a:73; Ivens 1927:141), and later diving into the sea to swim like the bonito. The burden for this initiation process came down on the parents, who had to ensure that their son was fed and that the owner of the againiwaiau, the bonito fishing canoe, could provide the boy with a catch to complete his ordeal. Faga, strings of red shell currency, compensated the canoe owner (Mead 1973b:71). Such strings of red shell were very similar to the type used on Ulawa (Ivens 1927:390),¹⁰ and this could have been the source for the Santa Ana currency--Mead (1973b) mentioned the far-traveled visitors from Ulawa who participated in the 1943 initiation ceremony at Gupuna village on Santa Ana. The climax of the

⁹Geoffrey Kuper's personal initiation rites undergone at Natagera, Santa Ana, in 1929 were used by Mead (1973b) as a yardstick for the performance of the final maraufu ceremony at Gupuna in 1943. Kuper served as a Coastwatcher for the Royal Australian Navy during World War II, reporting to Eric Feldt's headquarters in Townsville from Japanese-occupied Santa Isabel (Lord 1977:186).

¹⁰Ha'a, small red shell beads strung together in lengths with ten equalling a fathom were prized as the most valuable shell currency on Ulawa (Ivens 1972:390). The inlay work was accomplished with sections of la'o (cone shell) and reoreo (nautilus shell).

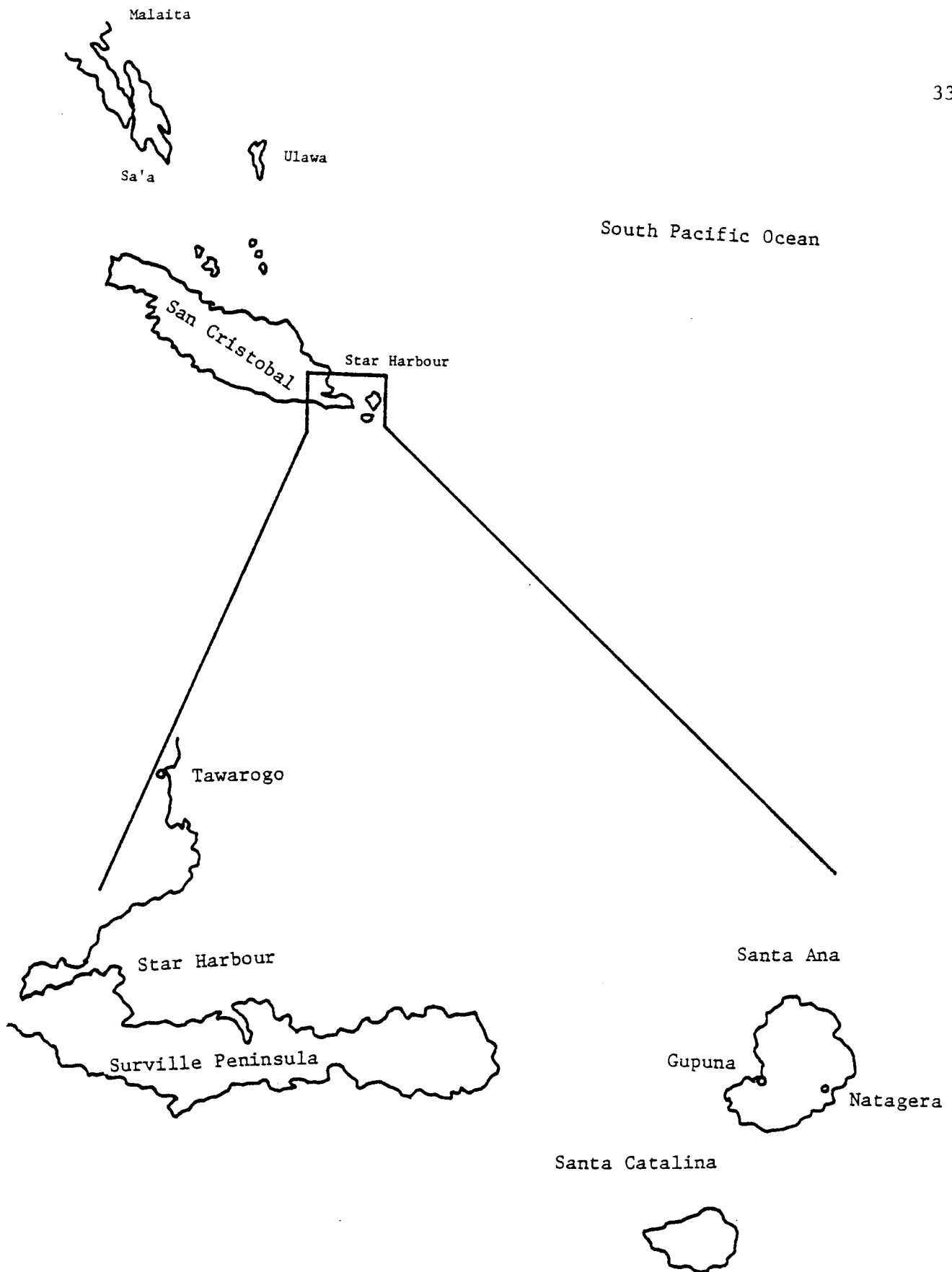
maraufu came when the candidate ascended the gea (initiation platform)-- a formidable structure ornately decorated with sharks, frigate birds, and bonitos carved into the planks of the platform. The feasts and the dancing would eventually close, and the apira, the againiwaiau, and the gea were disassembled or stored away in the appropriate custom houses (aofa).

This ceremonial institution faded more from the pressure placed on persons to provide the adequate financial backing needed in order to have such elaborate works and feasts than from any mission desires to quell native religions in the spread of the Christian faith. When Christianity became part of the religious scene at Santa Ana--the ceremonial gea was blessed in 1943 by a missionary (Mead 1973b:82) to provide double protection for the islanders who had adopted the faith--local desire still warranted the staging of the maraufu ceremonies. The destruction of Cyclone Ursula (Mead 1973a:67) in 1971 (after most of the research had been assembled by Mead and Davenport) destroyed the remaining Matagera custom houses on Santa Ana, besides damaging villages from Santa Catalina up to Tawarogo on San Cristobal. Small wonder that Mead looks at natural occurrences as under-played factors against the often-repeated acculturation process.

Even though the maraufu probably will not be revived because of the financial strain on the participants, the inlaid wood sculpture of this region continues to hold significance for men choosing an art career in order to advance to mwane arafa status, that is "big-men" political status for the men of Star Harbour (Mead 1979:294-296). Competition on an intra-island and intra-regional basis demands that any promising mwane

manira must establish himself by proving that his art has a receptive arena of buyers. With more visitors seeking ceremonial bowls, posts, and copies of airi caskets, the carvers will probably continue to scramble for the money and the accompanying prestige from making a good sale. The obvious danger of creating poorly-made pieces purely for the external tastes of collectors appears to be tempered with local criticism, still to be reckoned with for a prospective craftsman-big man.

The contemporary art of the Santa Ana-Santa Catalina-Star Harbour region (Mead 1973a:53-57) is developing innovations and themes (i.e., freestanding human figures for potential tourists) while maintaining the designs and finished products formerly associated with the traditional bonito cult. The carvers actually welcome tourists as a source of cash flow for their income-poor islands and are learning (with understandable confusion thrown in) about pricing their pieces and what to expect the newcomers to prefer. Mead (1973a:12) performed his research four years after Davenport had predicted that Solomons art was living on borrowed time. The lives of the people have altered some, but any new elements which may appear intrusive to the lifestyle are locally seen as simply part of the present way of life; the art produced is still Solomons art. If the acculturation process remains slow enough where the people can live according to their traditional village ways of subsistence, the sculpture of the Star Harbour region will continue to be made while the striving mwane manira seek to encapsulate within their work the traditional synthesis between man and the ocean (Mead 1973a:66).



Map 5. Star Harbour Region of Southeastern Solomons Republic

E. Big Nambas: Will the Nimangki Survive?

Malekula, the second-largest island of Vanuatu (formerly the New Hebrides Condominium) has served as sort of a beachhead for ethnological penetrations into the ideology of typical Melanesian cultures (Deacon 1934; Layard 1942). The three-dimensional art present in Malekula has been traditionally fashioned to supplement ceremonies associated with the Nimangki grade-society (Deacon 1934:270). This social, economic, and religious institution originally formed a great part of the lives of Malekulan ethnic groups. The series of grades proceeded from the lowest rank, attained when one was a boy, to the highest--reserved for only the most powerful and wealthiest chiefs. Just as the men were graded in the society, so was the namal--the men's house; the structure had separate compartments for members of each grade, and a man could only rest in his own section and cook his meals of yams only over the fire tended for his particular grade. Achieving grades developed into a life-long process for a man of Malekula, a process which always involved raising special pigs for ceremonial sacrifice (Deacon 1934:17). (A Malekulan "big-man" gains added social prestige through lending and borrowing--making deals and bargaining are common pursuits for indigenous men--to acquire the largest amount of prized tusker pigs, distinguishable by their ringed mandible tusks).

What of Malekulan arts in general? Fraser connects the tie between art and the socio-economic context by projecting that an accumulation of wealth (pigs--and plenty of them) were required to give feasts (1962:214), and this continually-ascending social ladder for the average man could involve some thirty-five distinctive stages to be attained, the highest

ones gained not only by a sufficient number of ceremonial pigs but also through stone work set up in monolithic style. Since boar's tusks are reminiscent of sought after wealth, they become a feature of Malekulan art, being planted into initiation and graded images which are subsequently concealed inside the namal (Christensen 1955:277-278). Painted blue, red, and white in a seemingly-garish indiscretion for color balance, they are produced by persons who sponsor candidates for grade-promoting rites. Almost all the major works in traditional Malekulan art present a home-made quality--with the exception of slit gongs, which Fraser claims (1962:216) are sculpted by professional craftsmen. The huge tree-fern images, nearly twelve feet high and carved by the candidates themselves, project an impression of man attempting to subdue nature by transforming the inverted tree-fern trunks into human faces. Christensen (1955:278) interjects the notion that the tremendous eyes of the tree-fern images appear to be conferring upon the invisible ancestors, giving the spirits the power to watch over their "children".

The Big Nambas are an indigenous people who dwell in the mountainous northern sector of Malekula, clinging to their past ways of fighting and pig-raising (Muller 1972:57-59). The actual name for this group comes from the size of their nambas, penis-wrappers made from purplish-dyed mats of pandanus leaves (Layard 1942:10), to distinguish them from a closely-related group called the Small Nambas. Inhabiting the "head" of the island, the Big Nambas have been notorious for cannibalism and head-hunting practices, which the Anglo-French Condominium could not suppress until the late 1940s (Muller 1972:75). The Big Nambas still persist in the acquisition of pigs and preparation of rituals for

grade-progression via the Nimangki society (Diole 1976:181-190). As in most Melanesian cultures, male domination prevails, and the Big Nambas¹¹ are no exception. Special rites for circumcision are performed (the only tribal group on Malekula which traditionally applied this ordeal to uninitiated boys), and kava (better known as a beverage utilized in Polynesian ceremonies) is a feature of the Big Namba ceremonial program (Deacon 1934:10). The arts fashioned by the Big Nambas consist of slit gongs, initiation masks, tree-fern images to mark ghosts of ancestors, and namal wood sculpture for added embellishment.

Four distinct grades made up the Nimangki grading scale for the Big Nambas: Dravu, Bwil, Vilvil, and Miliun (Deacon 1934:371-373). The Miliun grade is the highest and most difficult to achieve and attaining this status demands an enormous quantity of pigs for ceremonial sacrifice and circular or straight-lined monoliths to be erected. This occasion typifies the one "all-out" effort to be invested by a Big Namba candidate; all debts are called in and relatives from even distant hamlets are invited to take part in the festivities.

For a Big Namba man to achieve rank in the Nimangki, much work is channeled into preparations for the ceremonies and the feasting, including cultivating added amounts of yams. One further financial investment to make is the making of an appropriate slit gong to honor the individual's advancement. The instrument is carved and sometimes painted by an artist

¹¹Deacon was unable to spend much time in the Big Nambas' country during his research (Deacon 1934:xxxii-xxxiii), but the time he invested revealed serious depopulation and decay over much of Malekula from Spanish influenza, measles, and whooping cough.

specially hired by the person to receive the new grade (Deacon 1934: 359-360). Both the gong carver, and the painter (sometimes a separate crafter), have to be compensated for their efforts--usually in pigs.

Deacon could ascertain very little on the material culture of the Big Nambas before his untimely death in 1927. Muller reflects on the lack of internal contact between the Big and Small Nambas, attributing this to the rugged interior of Malekula;¹² the Big Nambas are outstanding for displaying fierce defense of their tribal lifestyle, while the Small Nambas receive attention because of their artistic abilities (1972:78).

One feature still alive among the Small Nambas (but not specifically determined to be a part of the Big Nambas' funerary heritage) is the making of rambaramp funeral effigies (Deacon 1934:20, 62). Common to most tribal groups down to Southwest Bay, rambaramps use the deceased man's skull, modeled over with clay and vegetable paste to resemble the dead. The effigy body is constructed from cane fibers, clay, and banana leaves--then placed in the namal after being paraded around to honor the departed man in a post-mortem procession.

What lies ahead for the Big Nambas of Malekula? Numbering no more than 125 persons, who prefer the hardy life in the mountains, the tribe gives all indications of being a candidate for eventual assimilation into the living routine of copra-planters on the Malekulan coast (Muller 1972: 57). Dirole disputes such an obvious conclusion, pointing to the diminutive

¹²Bonnemaïson (1977:121-124) states that wars between the Big Nambas and neighboring peoples drove survivors down to the coastal missions. Malekula is one of the larger islands of Vanuatu, but has a low population density (3.81/km² in 1967) compared to the heavy over-population of the small offshore islands of Vao (630/km²) and Wala (390/km²).

population of the Big Nambas (and the Small Nambas, also approximately 125) and their desire to remain outside the modern world as assets; the Nambas themselves see their numbers as too small for any progressive-minded organization to bother with via assimilation attempts (1976:186). They are aware of the coastal life, of the material products of the outer world (transistor radios and canned foods), and yet have chosen to remain in the interior. If the Big Nambas hold to this choice, the Nimangki will continue to center the activities, supplemented by art images for the grade ceremonies. In this manner, the plastic arts of the Big Nambas should survive; continued contacts--eventually improved through better internal communications may see more transference of art styles between the more artistically-able Small Nambas and the Big Nambas of northern Malekula.



Map 6. Malekula Island, Northern Vanuatu

III. COMPARISON OF THE CULTURES:

COMMON DENOMINATORS FOR RETENTION

The five cultures considered in this paper were: the Iatmul of the Middle Sepik, the northern New Ireland malanggan-producers, the Baining of the Gazelle Peninsula, the Star Harbour artisans of the eastern Solomons Republic, and the Big Nambas of Malekula. All of these have (or had) ceremonial institutions which concentrated on initiation for new men of the community. Such ceremonies honored the passing of deceased persons and especially illustrated the bonds felt between their culture and the surrounding physical and spiritual world. The art facilitated the operation of all the social and religious facets of the institutions, which had local variety in the scope and involvement of the art-makers. In the case of the Baining, the Iatmul, and the Big Nambas, the art products traditionally were made by non-specialized men of the community who assisted the ceremonial process (although certain persons did become noted for their art-producing abilities in the course of community life). The malanggan sculptors and painters of coastal northern New Ireland shared with the Star Harbour craftsmen the distinction of being specialized art-creators. As the aspiring mwane manira of the eastern Solomons passed through successive stages of art-producing to reach their goal (Mead 1979), so did the New Irelanders serve a period of apprenticeship, demonstrating their ability at satisfactorily reproducing images to bring forth the desired effect of a malanggan piece (Buhler 1962:46-48).

One associated feature of the art still being made by all five cultures is that even reproductions of it retain significance for the indigenous viewers. Why? Because the effort and skill put into the masks, funerary pieces, initiation images, and ceremonial vessels had to be merged with a sensitivity and emotional awareness--if the art was not to become repetitive and lifeless in nature. All these works did and still do encompass the artistic expression of an established belief-system; Christian ways of thinking have touched all five areas, as reported by Gardi (1960), Powdermaker (1933), Poole (1943), Mead (1973b), and Deacon (1934), but they have become an added feature of the general belief system rather than inducing the inhabitants to abandon their traditional ideals.

Comparative isolation from urbanized centers undoubtedly assists in some of the traditional beliefs remaining intact--at least for the people of the Sepik, the Star Harbour inhabitants, and the Big Mambas of interior Malekula. The coastal northern New Irelanders are removed from Kavieng, the provincial capital, but have access to it via a good road system. The Baining dwell within reasonable distance from Papua New Guinea's vital seaport of Rabaul, but perhaps this proximity to the coast favors even more their taking refuge in their masked fire dances. Hesse (1979:4-5) sees the Baining as suffering from an inferiority complex in the process of their external contacts, relieved only when they return home and break the monotony of life through their ceremonies.

These selected cultures have not retained their arts because they were completely shut off from external influences. This has developed from their adjustment and borrowing of outside innovations while

still keeping intact traditional means of expression, even though the situation which had utilized the indigenous art traditions transformed from influences (as for the New Irelanders and the Star Harbour peoples).

From the examples presented, a general conclusion could propose that art involving the majority of an indigenous community to participate in its creation--the art of the Iatmul, the Baining, and the Big Nambas--is more enduring within a cultural framework than art restricted to a crafting guild (New Ireland and Star Harbour). If the value systems which accompanied the art have eroded and the art becomes mainly a resource for acquiring cash through purchases by outsiders indicated by the Iatmul and Star Harbour situations will the traditional art continue?

IV. CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE OUTLOOK FOR TRADITIONAL ART IN MELANESIA

The contemporary situation in Melanesia, nation by nation, reveals that Papua New Guinea has made the most visible efforts in preserving traditional arts, through the establishment of the National Museum and Art Gallery at Waigani, the formation of the National Cultural Council and regional culture centers, and the attitudes of its leadership. Men like Michael Somare and Albert Maori Kiki have expressed pride in having maintained links with their respective cultural heritages. Somare realizes that the sacred kakar images of Dararap, Murik Lakes, still hold a vital significance for the well-being of the local people when he photographed them to preserve their record (Somare 1975:30-32). Somare's awareness, and Kiki's outrage at the insensitivity of collectors (1968: 165-167) who had stripped his native Orokelo region of nearly all the hohaos (venerated ancestral images) may further fuel the efforts to keep intact at least remnants of the cultural past.

What of the outside purchasers who seek samples of "pure" Melanesian sculpture to take back to relatives in Chicago, London, or Paris? As was stated earlier in this paper by May (1975:126), the contemporary impact of these visitors has led to mass-produced pieces of questionable quality and ethnological importance (their presence being an added deterrent to traditional belief and worship). Melanesian craftsmen realize that pieces which even remotely resemble their traditional works have a

market value, yet they may suspect that emphasis by outsiders to preserve their arts is one means for them to be "kept in their place."¹³

The five cultures considered in this research appear to present surviving samples of traditional art and have one more consideration to be focused in their direction: will their art continue? The question is not will the art change--but will the new art still evoke feeling and regard from the Iatmul, New Ireland, Baining, Star Harbour, and Big Namba societies?

Change is no new phenomenon for the peoples of Melanesia. They have endured the influences of explorers, missionaries, blackbirders, traders, military personnel, and now modern government officials. Why should their artistic expression not survive to some extent? It probably will not resemble the older, "classical" works--what culture alive would do things the same way as they were performed two centuries ago? But indications point to a surviving desire to represent visual elements of the cultural background in a professional and pleasing manner.

One serious flaw generated by the modern media is that through its touch people are seemingly more inter-connected than they are in reality. It should come as no great surprise that most people of all cultural environments in Melanesia are well aware of satellite communications, modern warfare, television, micro-wave cooking, or even space exploration. But these technological wonders are beyond the daily living experience of

¹³Cotlow (1971:190) notes the attitudes of some anthropologists, reflecting that all their efforts in the world cannot install pride in primitive peoples who have permitted themselves to believe that they are "refuse of History".

many persons, even in the United States and nations of Western Europe. Inhabitants of isolated islands in Melanesia are even further removed from the impact of such modern marvels. The ocean and land remain two of the few daily constants. With the demands that a cosmopolitan, consumption-oriented society would place on such limited areas, the cultures who choose to remain in their own settings may have made the only feasible selection. Can we deny the basic human rights to Melanesians--the right of how to live and the right of creative expression?

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